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KAMPUCHEA: Setback to United Front Prospects

Prince Sihanouk's failure to reach agreement with Democratic Kampuchean leader Khieu Samphan over participation in a united front, while not unexpected, is another setback to efforts by China and Thailand to create a unified resistance force against Vietnam in Kampuchea. [REDACTED]

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Negotiations, which took place in Pyongyang yesterday, stalled over Sihanouk's demand that all forces in Kampuchea disarm once the Vietnamese are driven out of Kampuchea. Sihanouk said, however, that he would be willing to meet again in late April. [REDACTED]

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Sihanouk's hot and cold approach to participation in a united front probably is intended to delay indefinitely any possibility of a merger between former Prime Minister Son Sann's Khmer People's National Liberation Front and the Democratic Kampuchean guerrillas. He would like to head a united front eventually, but wants to postpone serious negotiations until late fall in the hope that Democratic Kampuchea will lose its seat at the UN and thus be more responsive. [REDACTED]

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China and Thailand prefer that both Sihanouk and Son Sann participate. Sihanouk has considerable international prestige and Son Sann controls the only organized non-Communist force. With Sihanouk once again backing away, Beijing and Bangkok probably will concentrate on persuading Son Sann to join with Democratic Kampuchea, hoping that the Prince will eventually come around. [REDACTED]

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Formation of a united front would have more political than military importance. Thailand's colleagues in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have pushed for creation of a so-called third force or united front as a way to overcome Democratic Kampuchea's negative international image. There is no sign, however, of a major erosion of international support for Democratic Kampuchea, leaving all parties free to pursue their current tactics of noncommittal discussions. [REDACTED]

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